

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, on November 18th, 2009, I was absent for three rollcall votes because I was attending the funeral of a family member. If I had been here, I would have voted: "yes" on rollcall vote 896; "yes" on rollcall vote 897; and "yes" on rollcall vote 898.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall Nos. 896, 897, and 898 I was unavoidably detained.

Had I been present I would have voted "nay" on rollcall No. 896; "nay" on rollcall No. 897; and "nay" on rollcall No. 898.

PRIVILEGED REPORT ON RESOLUTION OF INQUIRY TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Mr. CONYERS, from the Committee on the Judiciary, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 111-341) on the resolution (H. Res. 871) directing the Attorney General to transmit to the House of Representatives certain documents, records, memos, correspondence, and other communications regarding medical malpractice reform, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 874

Mr. LATOURETTE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 874.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DRIEHAUS). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill, H.R. 3791.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Tennessee?

There was no objection.

FIRE GRANTS REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2009

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 909 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 3791.

□ 1254

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 3791) to amend sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, and for other purposes, with Mr. JACKSON of Illinois in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. GORDON) and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. SMITH) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. GORDON of Tennessee. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 3791, the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2009. This bill reauthorizes the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program. Over the past 9 years, these programs have provided over \$5 billion to purchase firefighting equipment and training, and for communities to hire additional firefighters. This Federal support for public safety is even more important in this tough economy as local officials struggle to provide services in the face of decreasing budgets.

The provisions in this bill make several changes to the program to enable more fire departments to apply for grants, and to ensure that the programs can benefit all types of communities, from small towns to our largest cities.

As part of this, the bill apportions the AFG funding between the career, volunteer, and combination fire departments according to a formula that authorizes a minimum of 25 percent of each year's total AFG dollars for each type of department.

The bill also authorizes the director to waive matching funds, budget maintenance requirements and other requirements for fire departments facing exceptional economic hardships. It further lowers the matching requirement for AFG and modifies the matching structure of SAFER to make it easier for communities to plan for the commitment of a SAFER grant.

The Science Committee heard testimony from fire service experts in July that, particularly in this economy, the current matching requirements dissuaded some departments from applying. These provisions enable those fire departments with the most need to apply.

Finally, H.R. 3791 also increases the amount of money larger jurisdictions may apply for under the AFG program. These amounts better reflect the needs of larger metropolitan areas as well as fire departments that have been consolidated to provide unified coverage to a large area.

H.R. 3791 is the product of much hard work by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the National Volunteer Fire Council, the National Fire Protection Association, and the Congressional Fire Services Institute. It has been endorsed by all of these groups. This bill has bipartisan support and passed out of the Science and Technology Committee by voice vote.

I would like to once again thank Mr. MITCHELL for sponsoring this important legislation. I would also like to recognize the efforts of our subcommittee chairman, Mr. WU, in getting the policy right in this bill and working to get a consensus piece of legislation. I also want to thank Mr. PASCRELL of New Jersey for being the father of the origination of these bills, as well as Majority Leader STENY HOYER for bringing all of the parties together and working together to get a good bill out.

Finally, I would like to recognize the staff who have been integral in crafting this legislation: Meghan Housewright and Mike Quear on the majority staff, and Dan Byers on the minority staff.

We have some amendments today. I look forward to working with my colleagues today to make a good bill better.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 3791, the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2009. This bill reauthorizes both the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program, which both provide much-needed assistance to fire departments across the Nation.

As we learned through our committee work on this bill, and as I have heard firsthand in discussions with fire chiefs and firefighters in my district, the AFG program is frequently cited as a "life saver" and the only means by which many departments can acquire up-to-date equipment and training—which requires a significant portion of their budget—for their firefighters.

This is particularly true in rural areas such as my district in rural Nebraska, where many communities rely upon all-volunteer departments to respond to fires and other emergencies. The equipment needed to fight fires and save lives and property is costly, and required for departments to meet certain minimum response capabilities regardless of whether they are protecting a community of a few hundred people or a large city of a few hundred thousand people. As such, firefighter grants have proven absolutely vital for rural and volunteer fire departments, which have small tax bases and the least ability to acquire such equipment.

□ 1300

The bill before us today makes several modest changes to the AFG and SAFER programs, reflecting a compromise reached by the leading national fire service organizations who worked closely with the Science and Technology Committee to develop this legislation. I support these changes and the underlying reauthorization effort, and I want to call attention to two in particular which I offered as amendments during committee consideration